

WASHINGTON, DC -- Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (D-Lakewood) gave the following speech on the floor of the House of Representatives today in opposition to H. R. 3688, the United States-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement Implementation Act.

"I rise in strong opposition to H. R. 3688, which would implement the U.S.-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement.

"This is not a choice between trade and protectionism. It is a choice between fair trade, which can benefit working families across the nation, and unfair trade, which benefits the wealthiest few at the expense of the rest of us.

"While there are some welcome, but minor, improvements to the Peru FTA as compared to NAFTA and CAFTA, the agreement is still not good enough. I feel like I'm at a used car lot. And the dealer is trying to sell me a beat-up old NAFTA lemon with a brand new paint-job and trying to tell me it's a great car.

"Well, we learned with NAFTA that there are no refunds for the American people when they're sold a bad bill of goods. Let's learn from our mistakes and reject this Peru FTA junker!

"To serve the American people, we must work for real trade reform, not just put a band-aid on a trade model that has been bleeding jobs from this country since 1994.

"Supporting this new deal requires us to believe in two things: 1) the actual benefits of the NAFTA free trade model, and 2) the promises of the Bush Administration.

"Considering the first question, the actual benefits of the NAFTA model are about as real as the tooth fairy.

"NAFTA was supposed to solve illegal immigration by developing a robust economy in Mexico that would give hard-working people the opportunity to provide for their families without having to leave their homeland behind. That didn't work.

"Instead, undocumented immigration has actually increased. Subsidized crops from the U.S. pushed millions of farmers off their land. And many of those displaced farmers ended up emigrating to the United States, whether or not they had proper documentation, just so they could find work to support their families.

"CAFTA, another so-called improvement on the NAFTA model, was supposed to include bold new safety and wage protections for workers. But these protections are disappointingly weak, allowing countries to downgrade their own labor laws.

"We have learned that the NAFTA Free Trade model is designed to favor the wealthiest few and corporate bottom line at the expense of small businesses, workers, families, and our communities.

"As to the second question, I think this Administration has made it pretty clear that it has no

interest in enforcing labor laws.

“The BP Texas City explosion, the Sago and Crandall Canyon mine disasters, and the failure to protect 9/11 first responders and clean-up workers who have developed serious breathing ailments—these are just a few of the most notorious examples of this Administration’s dereliction of duty to provide even the most basic protection to workers: the right to work in a safe environment.

“So long as we have to rely on this Administration to protect the rights and safety of working men and women, we will continue to be disappointed.

“To some in this House, the only redeeming value of this trade agreement seems to be that it’s not as bad as the deals with Colombia and Korea.

“But that argument misses the point: when they say “not that bad,” we have to stand up for the American people and say “Not good enough.”

“Finally, the Peru FTA offers inadequate protection for numerous endangered species that live in the forests of Peru, like the giant river otter and the jaguar. If it’s such a great agreement, why has no environmental group gone on record as supporting or embracing this agreement? I asked my colleagues this, and I don’t think they have an answer.

“Let me just remind my colleagues who I have heard over and over on the floor tonight say that ‘the enemy of the good is the perfect.’ Well from where I sit, the enemy of the good is the bad, and this is a bad agreement.

“We now have choice before us. We should choose to vote NO to a non-democratic process, NO to benefiting big business at the expense of the little guy, NO to ignoring the will of the American people, and NO on the Peru FTA.”